



*The use and abuse of*  
**INLAID ENAMEL**  
*as a decorative medium*  
*in Architecture*

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**T**HIRTY years ago when the Craft Revival Movement was in full swing with much activity in hammered copper, it occurred to some of the revivalists that the introduction of ornament in the form of vitreous enamel would be an effective adjunct, and in due course this appeared in the form of bright spots of iridescent colour.

At about that time it also occurred to the Birmingham Guild that the use of vitreous enamel should be taken seriously, not only as a decorative medium, but as a material of extreme permanence with a surface impervious to any atmospheric condition. The first result was its use for name plates and lettering, where its permanence and legibility almost immediately gained recognition.

Not satisfied with that particular use of enamel the Birmingham Guild experimented with larger and larger surfaces, with ultimate success, proving the qualifications of this material as an appropriate and interesting medium of great permanency and lasting surface for decorative use in buildings both externally and internally.

Inlaid enamel on bronze or copper is capable, in flat treatment, of expressing the utmost refinement and purity of form as applied to simple well considered shapes. Its colour interest takes the place of the light and shade interest of relief work. The flat surfaces of these inlaid forms gives every opportunity for the display of the texture and quality of the material, which it is needless to say is entirely different from that of a painted surface. Such treatment is aesthetically right and practical, as the surfaces can be easily cleaned of dust, like a window.

For curved surfaces, and surfaces in relief, enamel is not a suitable medium, is not only technically difficult or impracticable, but also such use does not express the qualities of the material; it is an abuse. Where coloured relief work is required, paint is the correct medium and the craft of the painter is properly applied.

Colour schemes in inlaid enamel for external decoration in particular, require the most careful consideration. In a large building, surrounded by other large buildings, there is a descaling in colour value just as there is in mass.

The experience and knowledge which the Birmingham Guild have attained in this craft, are willingly and completely at the disposal of Architects contemplating its use. It is to be deplored that the abuse of this craft when treated with technical incompetence and ignorance prejudices its use and prevents the accomplishment of work which could be of beauty and vital interest.

C. A. LLEWELYN ROBERTS.

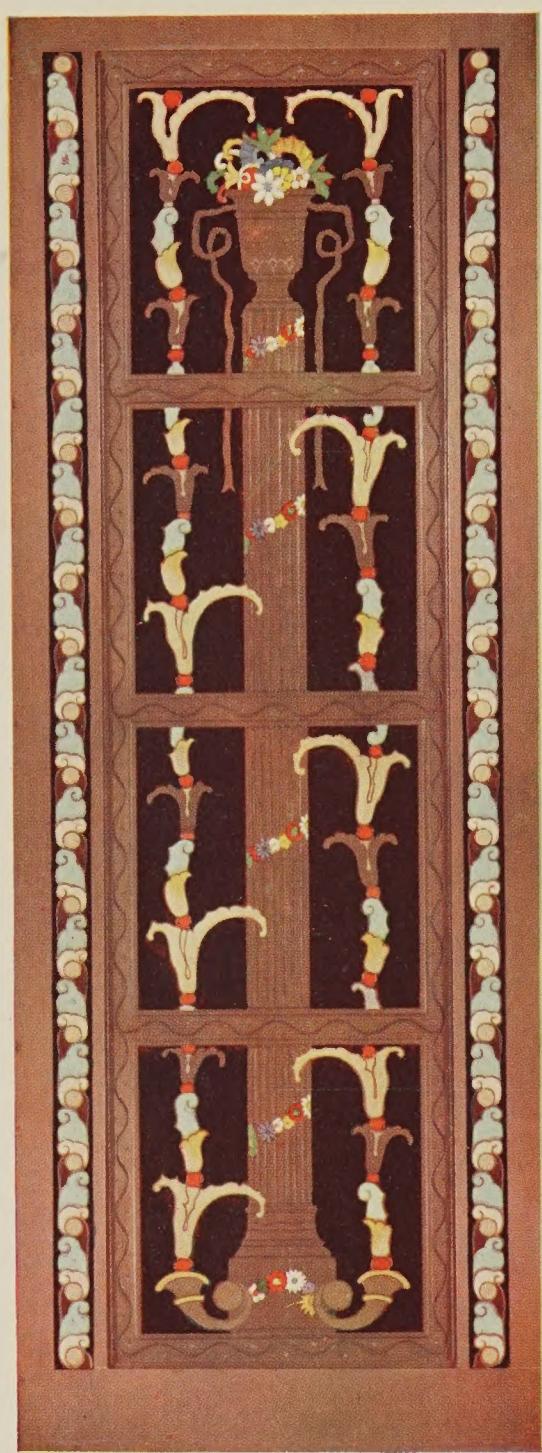
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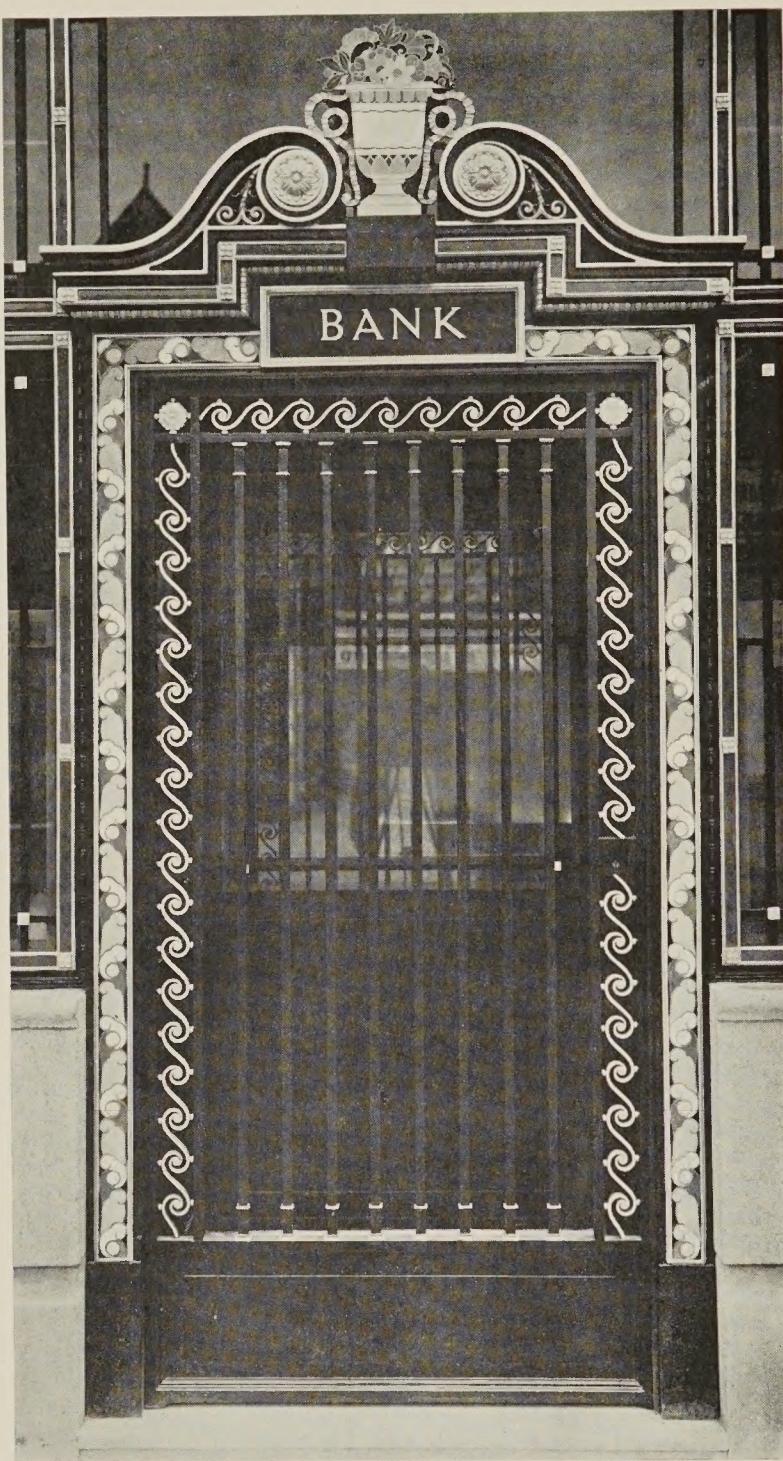
*R. Hugh Roberts  
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Bronze and Champlevé Enamel Door, 8 x 3ft.  
designed and made by  
The Birmingham Guild Ltd.  
for a large office building, Fifth Avenue,  
New York.

THE craft of enamelling, that is, the fusing of special coloured glasses on to metal, is of very ancient origin—It was much practised by the *Egyptians* and in the early periods of *Chinese* civilisation. Fine enamelling was produced by the *French* and *Italians* in the early mediæval period and during the Renaissance—In short it is one of the very oldest and most frequently occurring methods of ornamenting metal. If we trace back the history of this craft we shall find many rare and beautiful examples of its use in connection with Jewellery, Vases, Medals, Plaques, Triptyches, Altar Crosses: all comparatively small objects of art work. It was not, however, until a few years ago that the craft was developed, after much experimenting of an æsthetic as well as technical nature, by *The Birmingham Guild Ltd.* on an architectural scale.

It is true that at the end of the 19th century a few tentative and in general unsuccessful attempts at enamelling in repoussé copper were made; there still survive a few finger plates, hearth canopies and curbs embellished with spots and roundels of



*Entrance Door to the National Provincial Bank,  
Lewisham, carried out in Wrought Iron with Bronze  
and Champlevé Enamel Enrichments. Made by  
The Birmingham Guild Ltd.*

*By kind permission of the Architects  
Messrs. F. C. R. Palmer and W. F. C. Holden.*

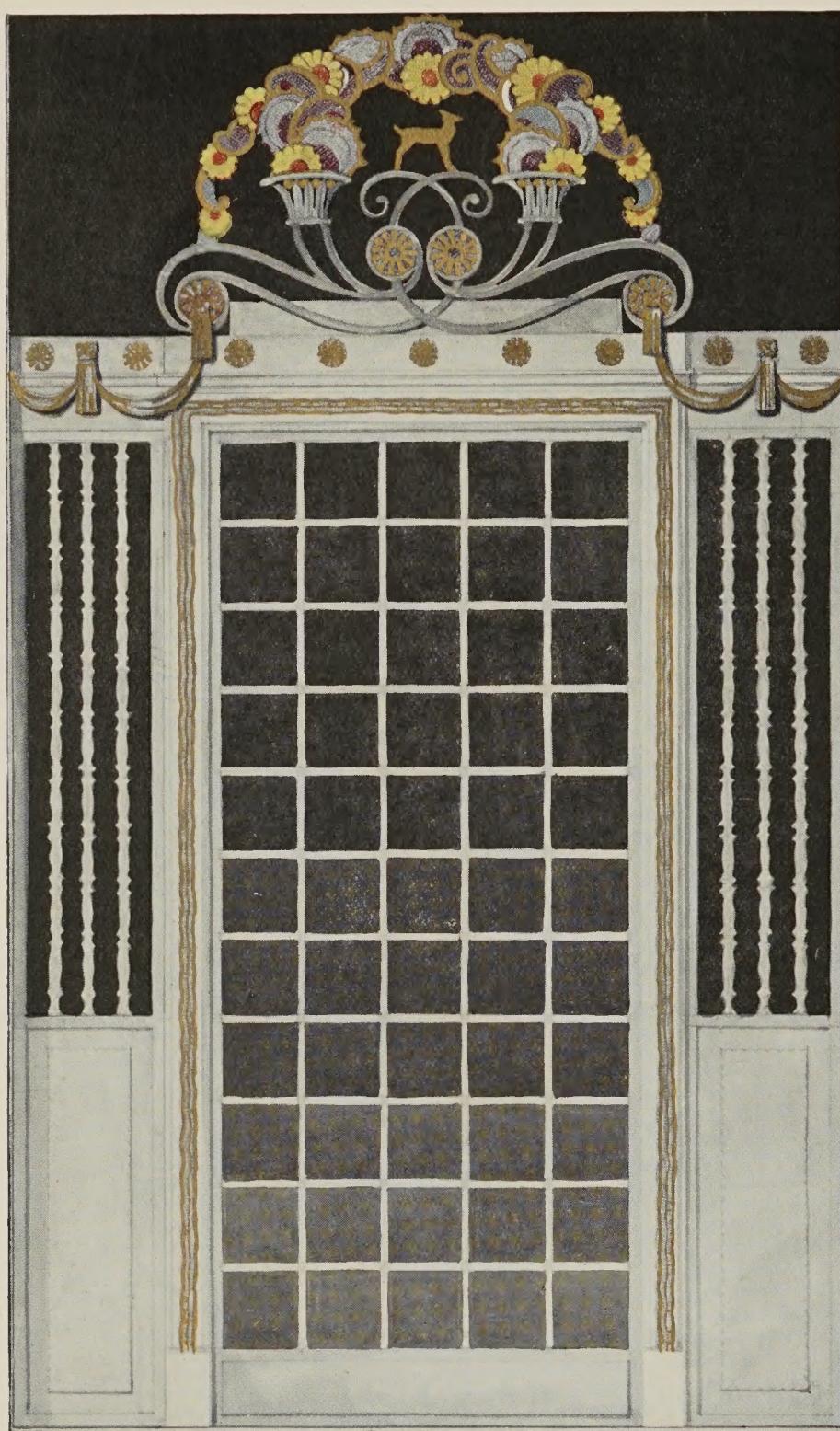


enamel—bright assertive patches—the last relic of commercialised “Art Nouveau.”

It was not on these lines that the Birmingham Guild made its experiments but rather with a view to the practical end of investigating the possibility of colour decoration in architecture

— a colour decoration that would be permanent, harmonious, strike a note of gaiety without being bizarre, and capable of production at a moderate cost.

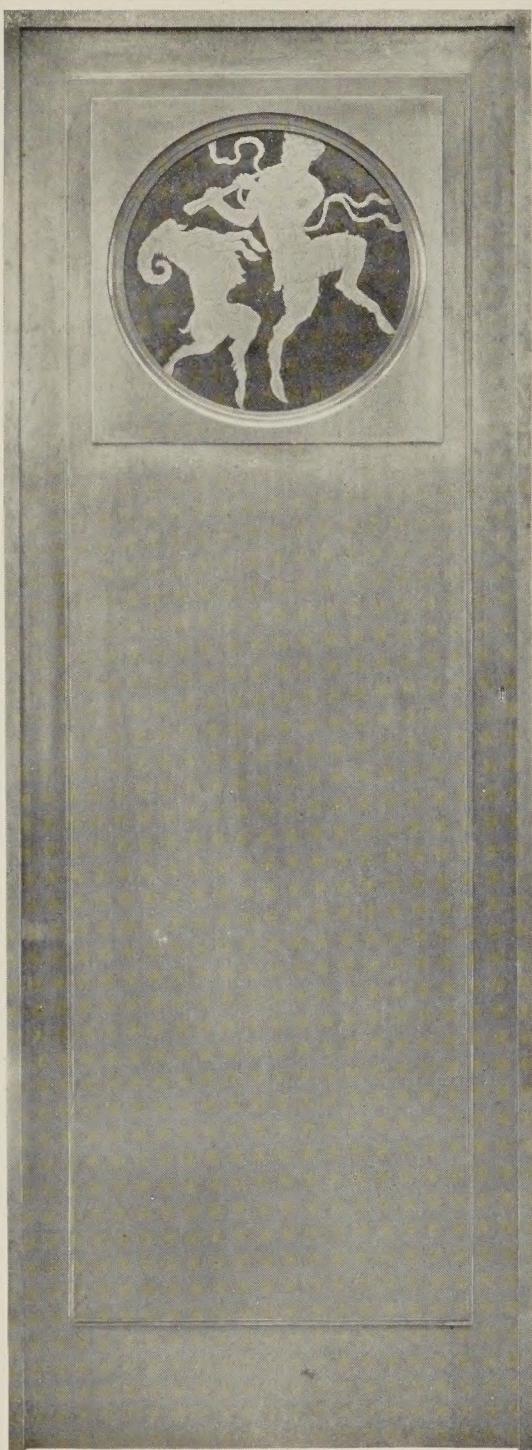
As a first effort the Guild experimented on smaller architectural features such as name plates, signs and fascia lettering—a quarter of a century ago the first name plate in bronze with lettering in ivory enamel, instead of in brass with waxed



*Vestibule Screen, carried out in "Staybrite" Steel, with  
Damascened Gold Ornament and Champlevé Enamel.*

engraved lettering, was produced by the Guild. Its striking legibility, its permanence—the first example, an architect's name plate, is still in use and as good as new—the dignified contrast of the rich bronze background to the ivory lettering, were such obvious advantages that name plates and memorial tablets of this type may now be seen in every quarter of the globe: the old brass plate which needed a daily cleaning to look respectable is almost a relic of the past.

From this followed in natural sequence the enamelled fascia letter and the hanging sign—for the latter the less expensive form of vitreous enamelling on iron was found to be the most suitable and the Guild has produced many signs embodying the practical qualities of permanency and legibility with gay colour scheme and fine lettering. Among such we may mention the *London General Omnibus Co.'s* Indication Signs, *The Trust House* Hanging Signs, the *Wilson Brewery Company's* Signs, the *Royal Borough of Kensington* Street Name Plates and many hotel and inn signs throughout the country.



Bronze Door with Engraved Bronze  
and Champlevé Enamel Panel, for  
Messrs. Barker's new premises.  
By kind permission of the Architect,  
H. L. Cabuche, Esq., O.B.E.

*The Birmingham Guild* did not, however, stop at the production of name plates, memorial tablets, lettering and signs in bronze and enamel—its experiments both in technique and design were continued with a view to evolving a serious form of exterior decoration of buildings on a scale hitherto unattempted—Its designers considered that on many types of architectural elevations such as shop frontages, entrance doors, windows, etc., colour decoration might well take the place of mouldings and enrichments in relief; that it was quite unnecessary that it should be crude or assertive, but that it could be used soberly and with distinction in the form of continuous bands in place of mouldings, in panels and generally in many suitable architectural forms.

One of the first opportunities that occurred of using enamel in this way was in connection with the Entrance Hall at *Messrs. Marshall & Snelgrove's* premises in Oxford Street, London. The result has been recognised as an unqualified success from architectural, decorative and practical points of view. Subsequently bronze and enamel canopies



*Canopy in Bronze and Enamel, for  
Messrs. Marshall & Snelgrove's premises, Oxford Street.  
Messrs. Gibson & Gordon, Architects.*

were erected at *Marshall & Snelgrove's* and also at *Messrs. Debenham & Freebody's* premises, Wigmore Street, W., and enamelled window decoration at *Messrs. Bourne & Hollingsworth's* new premises, Oxford Street, London, and more recently a bank frontage for *the National Provincial Bank Ltd.* at Lewisham.

There is unquestionably an attractiveness, a note of freshness and gaiety, about enamel colour decoration—used appropriately—which relieves the eye wearied of the dusty dullness of heavy mouldings and ponderous enrichments in relief which have become the commonplace of so many of our city frontages.

*The Birmingham Guild's* designers welcome the opportunity of co-operating with architects who desire to use this new form of decoration on their buildings. As there are certain technical limitations to its use, it is very desirable that the advice of the Guild's experts should be sought in connection with designs which embody this type of decoration.

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EXAMPLE OF ARCHITECTURAL DETAIL INLAID ENAMEL.

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